


2019

Lessons from the 1800s: Creating the Miss Porter's School Digital Archive

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Deborah (2019) "Lessons from the 1800s: Creating the Miss Porter's School Digital Archive," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 6 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol6/iss1/21>

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Lessons from the 1800s: Creating the Miss Porter's School Digital Archive

Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgments The author is grateful to Athena Salaba, associate professor at Kent State University's School of Library and Information Science, and Fiona York, head librarian at Miss Porter's School for their guidance during the practicum and suggestions regarding this paper.

Introduction

In 2018 the author conducted a master of library science practicum at Miss Porter's School, an independent girls' school in Farmington, Connecticut, with the goal of digitizing items from the school's physical archive related to Sarah Porter and nineteenth-century women's education. The internship involved more than 150 on-site hours between December 2017 and May 2018 and resulted in four digitized collections. This article describes the practicum process, the school's collections, issues encountered specific to representation within a women's educational archive, and recommendations for future collaboration.

Educational institutions have played an important role in the collection and preservation of historical material related to women.¹ However, the oldest continuously operating American women's college, Mount Holyoke College, did not open until 1837, two centuries after Harvard University and the College of William & Mary. As women's access has increased since the 1830s, American higher education has boomed. Prior to 1860, there were approximately 380 colleges in the United States.² A century and a half later, as of 2014, there were approximately 4,700 degree-granting, postsecondary institutions.³

Paradoxically, while higher education overall has expanded, the number of single-sex colleges has shrunk. Most women's colleges have closed or become coeducational in the past fifty years and many remaining single-sex institutions have considered such measures. In 2014, the Women's College Coalition reported that there were only forty-six women's colleges in America, down from two hundred in the 1960s.⁴ Taking into account colleges that were formerly single sex and are now coeducational, less than 1 percent of America's colleges and universities may be continuous repositories of early American women's educational material. Fortunately, there is an additional set of educational institutions that have significant archival holdings important to American history. This group includes privately run secondary schools, commonly termed "prep schools" (that is, college preparatory).

Prior to 1900, most American prep schools were male, single-sex institutions founded to provide education for the sons of well-off families. New York state is home to the Emma Willard School, considered the first school to offer female students a serious, intellectually focused, private education.⁵ Born in Connecticut, Emma Hart Willard was a farmer's daughter. She opened her

¹ Collections specific to women's history include several at colleges and universities, such as the Sallie Bingham Center at Duke University, the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa, and the Seven Sisters' College Women collaboration. Even when an archive or library is not specialized, it may have collections of importance to women's history, such as Virginia Commonwealth University's oral histories of Equal Rights Amendment activists, the Women's Library collection on suffrage at the London School of Economics, and the family papers and holdings of the Alberta Women's Memory Project, hosted by Athabasca University. For a dated, but comprehensive, list of other women's archives and resources, see Eva Mosley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of America," *The American Archivist* 36, no. 2 (April 1973): 216–20.

² Thomas D. Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, January 1993), 71.

³ National Center for Education Statistics, "Fast Facts," accessed January 6, 2019, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>.

⁴ Women's College Coalition, "The Truth About Women's Colleges," accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.womenscolleges.org/discover/reports/truth-about-womens-colleges>.

⁵ Emma Willard School, "About Emma Hart Willard," accessed January 6, 2019,

first school in 1807 in Vermont before moving to New York and starting what was then known as the Troy Female Seminary. Other schools like Emma Willard's soon opened, providing female students the scholastic opportunity denied them at elite male institutions.

Miss Porter's School is a college preparatory independent school that has operated as single-sex female since its inception.⁶ The school is named for its founder, Sarah Porter. Born in 1813, Porter was the third of seven children and the first daughter of congregationalist minister Noah Porter and his wife Mehitabel Meigs. Porter was educated at home in the village of Farmington, Connecticut. At age nineteen she studied informally with professors in New Haven, where her older brother Noah attended Yale University. Noah would later serve as president of Yale for fifteen years, from 1871 to 1886.

Porter founded the school that bears her name in 1843. Citing economic and family reasons, she left a year later to teach in Buffalo, New York for "greater pecuniary compensation."⁷ Returning to Farmington in 1847, Porter resumed her school and opened a new building in 1849. In the early years her school functioned mostly as a boarding and tutorial arrangement, with Porter the sole instructor. But a rigorous curriculum that included natural science, languages, social sciences, and music helped the school's reputation grow and Porter hired paid instructors.⁸

In 1885, Porter retired from running the daily operations of the school, appointing Mary Dunning Dow as her successor. Porter's name remained a marketable commodity and continued to appear in printed announcements about school matters, which referred to management as "Miss Porter and Mrs. Dow." Porter's death in 1900 came at a time when the school was run as a private family business and her will spelled out shared management between Dow and Porter's nephew, Robert Porter Keep. Dow received a salary and a share of the operating profits. This arrangement lasted only briefly, until faced with increased facilities expenditures, Dow resigned in 1903 after a failed attempt to have school finances run by a trustee board. Dow then led a school in Briarcliff, New York while Miss Porter's School continued under family management until 1948, when it was incorporated as a non-profit institution.⁹

About the Project

In December 2017, the author began a semester-long internship practicum at the Miss Porter's School M. Burch Tracy Ford Library as part of master's in library science curriculum requirements at Kent State University's iSchool of Library and Information Science.

Early in the practicum, a survey of independent school archives revealed that few independent schools have digitized their collections (table 1).¹⁰ The reasons why less than a quarter of these

<https://www.emmawillard.org/page/about-emma-hart-willard>.

⁶ Miss Porter's School, "School History," accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.porters.org/page/explore/school-history>.

⁷ Nancy Davis and Barbara Donohue, *Miss Porter's School: A History* (Farmington, CT: Miss Porter's School, 1992), 2–4.

⁸ Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame, "Sarah Porter," accessed December 29, 2018, <https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/education-preservation/sarah-porter>.

⁹ Davis and Donohue, *Miss Porter's School*, 29–30, 48.

¹⁰ The schools selected for this comparison were institutions that Miss Porter's School defines as peer schools.

forty schools had digitized their collections was not studied, but could include issues related to available funding, staff time, and the condition or composition of materials within the physical collections. What was clear is that there was a unique position for digitized collections, especially for a school like Miss Porter's—one of the oldest independent schools with archival holdings. As one of the only all-female schools operating continuously since the 1800s, the school has many documents that predate American women's political emancipation.

In December 2017, an initial archival assessment was made. The main archives room, twenty-five by fifteen feet, consists of a long work counter with three rows of shelving and several vertical file cabinets.¹¹ Early project challenges related to the absence since 2008 of a dedicated archivist for the collections. In the intervening decade, the collection had also been moved from a historic converted home to a room in the school's library (an ADA-accessible, climate-controlled building constructed in 2000). Despite the relocation, immediate measures were needed for dust remediation, temperature control, and reorganization before collection assessment could begin. Although the archives had technically been closed for a decade, donations had continued to come in; the absence of an archivist also meant that these donations had been minimally processed. Navigating the collection was physically and intellectually difficult, evocative of the dilemma that Maria Joao Mogarro described in 2008: “school archives have occupied diverse physical places, because they have been successively transferred throughout the history of the scholastic institute to which they belong . . . during these transferences the initial logical organization may have been lost.”¹²

These include American schools from the Eight Schools Association, the Founders League, and selected members of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools.

¹¹ The space has not proved sufficient; materials were also stored in an office closet and a converted utility space that housed computer equipment.

¹² Maria Joao Mogarro, “Archives and Education: The Construction of Educational Memory,” *Educational Sciences Journal* 1 (September/December 2006): 71–84.

Table 1: Selected Independent Schools, by Year Founded. Single-sex female schools italicized bold.

INSTITUTION	YEAR FOUNDED	HAS ARCHIVES?	COLLECTION ONLINE?	ARCHIVIST ON STAFF?
Phillips Andover Academy	1778	Yes	Yes	
Phillips Exeter Academy	1781	Yes	No	
Deerfield Academy	1797	Yes	No	
Milton Academy	1798	Yes	No	
Lawrenceville School	1810	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Emma Willard School</i>	<i>1814</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Western Reserve Academy	1826	Yes	No	
<i>Miss Porter's School</i>	<i>1843</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
St. Paul's School	1856	Yes	Yes	
The Peddie School	1864	No	No	
<i>Stoneleigh Burnham School</i>	<i>1869</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	
<i>Hathaway Brown</i>	<i>1876</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	
Northfield Mount Hermon School	1879	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Dana Hall</i>	<i>1881</i>	<i>Unverified</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Brearley School</i>	<i>1884</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	
Groton School	1884	No	No	
Westminster School	1888	No	No	
The Thacher School	1889	No	No	
Woodberry Forest School	1889	No	No	
Taft School	1890	Yes	No	Yes
Choate Rosemary Hall	1890	Yes	No	Yes
Hotchkiss School	1891	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Spence School</i>	<i>1892</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	
<i>Chatham Hall</i>	<i>1894</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	
<i>Culver Academies</i>	<i>1894</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
<i>Miss Hall's School</i>	<i>1898</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Asheville School	1900	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Chapin School</i>	<i>1901</i>	<i>Unverified</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
Salisbury School	1901	Yes	Yes	
Kent School	1906	No	No	
<i>Madeira School</i>	<i>1906</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Berkshire School	1907	Yes	Yes	
<i>Castilleja School</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	
Trinity Pawling School	1907	No	Yes	Yes
Kingswood Oxford School	1909	Unverified	Unverified	
<i>Westover School</i>	<i>1909</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes (volunteer)</i>
<i>Ethel Walker School</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>Unverified</i>	<i>No</i>	
<i>Hockaday School</i>	<i>1913</i>	<i>Unverified</i>	<i>No</i>	
Loomis Chaffee School	1914	Yes	Yes	Yes
Avon Old Farms	1927	No	No	

An immediate need with the Porter's archive was to understand the collection on an organizational level. Most of the physical collection prior to 2008 has been processed and stored in folders and boxes with catalog labels. Most items donated after 2008 were uncatalogued. It was decided in the first week that focus needed to be on digitization but establishing what to digitize was difficult due to the absence of an accurate shelf list or collection guide. Fortunately, assistance was available; during the practicum a student completing an independent study in the history department was recruited to compile a shelf list. The completed list can now be combined with the card catalog to identify where items are housed.

Time was spent opening boxes and files throughout the collection to get a sense of what had been catalogued, what was most fragile and should be prioritized for digital preservation, and the time periods of various items. Hours were also spent with a card catalog of five drawers of index cards typed prior to 2008, arranged alphabetically by subject and author. This catalogue uses a combined number and lettering system divided into broad categories. Photographs are not catalogued but stored in vertical file cabinets by decade. Ephemera are also not catalogued. While some books have been added to the library's online catalog, most archival items remain catalogued only on index cards.

Prior to scanning items, the author spoke with a librarian at an independent school in Massachusetts who had digitized alumni magazines, newspapers, yearbooks, and other holdings using Omeka's open source platform. This conversation provided guidance regarding file naming conventions, formats, templates, and scanning hardware. The author then met with staff in the school's information technology department to install a scanner and laptop, and to establish file naming and storage protocols. One working consideration for digitization was copyright protection. Many items in the digital collections deliberately predate 1898, which was the 120-year threshold for copyright. Another consideration were regulations and best practices related to the privacy of student and faculty records (FERPA, HIPAA¹³), which made digitization of more recent materials problematic. In terms of curation, this led to an emphasis on digitization of photographs and writing related to Sarah Porter, as well as documents from the earliest decades of the school's operations.

In February 2018 scanning began with an Epson Perfection 4490 Photo flatbed scanner connected to a Lenovo R61 laptop, both housed in the main archival room. Epson scanning software was installed on the laptop. As images were scanned, they were uploaded onto the laptop, named, and stored in a folder. A backup copy was added to a dedicated folder on the school's Google Drive. All items were scanned in reflective 24-bit color at 800dpi in TIFF (tagged image file) format.¹⁴ Initial test scans were made in mid-February and evaluated for quality. As many photographs had warped over time, it was necessary to minimize skew.¹⁵ Since Omeka allows attachment of

¹³ Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

¹⁴ Automatic backlight correction, unsharp mask, and color restoration were used when these processes resulted in clearer images, but the bulk of the collection was not scanned using additional settings. Items were named with a number and letter combination; front and back sides were scanned with reverse sides indicated by the addition of a lowercase letter "a" in the file name. In cases of multiple copies of the same image in the physical collection, the clearest image was selected. When images were deemed of similar quality, items with handwritten notes indicating a year or further identifying the image were scanned.

¹⁵ In addition, the Epson automatically adjusted images so they were not faithful reproductions. These problems

multiple images for each item record, scan area was delimited, and each TIFF file was uploaded directly to Omeka as a stand-alone image.¹⁶ Works were scanned in their entirety to include borders, handwritten or printed notes, and signs of physical wear and tear. The goal was to produce a full digital record of each work as found in the physical collection at the time of scanning. This treatment also reflected the way the school has actively used archival items during its history (described below).

After scanning, items were transcribed, described, and keyword tagged using Dublin Core standards and Library of Congress subject headings. Keywords describe items and enable primary source retrieval by faculty and students based on subject areas taught at the school.¹⁷

Sarah's School

A history of Miss Porter's School was published in the 1990s.¹⁸ This public history of the school reveals that very little has been written about Sarah Porter as an individual. With Porter's retirement in the 1880s and her death more than a century ago, there are no longer any living school alumnae who knew her. Her story therefore relies on the written archival record.

The school enjoys an affectionate interest in, and participatory enthusiasm for, its place in history. During reunions, when alumnae return to campus, it has been a custom to display items from the archives at a table where guests register for festivities. Items for display are selected to represent the history of a reunion's classes and include general memorabilia. Alumnae handle and interact with items, embracing their institutional history physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

Other school practices also incorporate history into the living fabric of the school. In offices and common spaces, photos and items representing the school, its faculty, and students often appear. Notably, there are several oil paintings depicting Porter on campus, including three on the first floor of the school's main building (including an impressive portrait that presides over the dining hall). Since the portraits date to a time when Porter was an older accomplished woman, a serious and formal painted representation of her has become iconic within the school community. The

were minimized by aligning photos on the flatbed scanner using a ruler. Manual adjustment also resulted in more accurate color reproduction.

¹⁶ Given the short-term nature of the practicum, the author elected to scan as many images as possible and spent less time making image enhancements. This meant images were not color corrected or fade enhanced. Midway through the practicum, the project exceeded available storage space on Omeka. The easiest solution would have been to purchase increased storage space on Omeka.net. However, the library works with a fixed budget and could commit to a basic Omeka.net cloud storage option, which was cheaper than purchasing the additional equipment that would be needed to host its own storage. To remain within the available storage, the author converted existing TIFF files on Omeka.net to Adobe PDF format and reloaded these PDF files into the first three collections. The fourth collection was scanned and saved in both TIFF and PDF formats, with the PDFs then uploaded to Omeka. This freed up considerable space and privileged the principles of "most access" and "widest use" against the additional granularity that TIFF images could render. The decision also affirmed the primary importance of the collections as teaching tools for students and faculty at the school, with wider public and scholarly access as secondary considerations. Since all items are saved in TIFF format, the institution retains the flexibility to publish TIFF files in the future.

¹⁷ For a description of keyword tags in non-traditional disciplines, see Mark A. Greene, "Using College and University Archives as Instructional Materials: A Case Study and an Exhortation," *The Midwestern Archivist* 14, no. 1 (1989): 35.

¹⁸ Davis and Donohue, *Miss Porter's School*.

portraits are themselves a source of campus folklore and reinterpretation. Several years before this digitization project, the author observed a local newspaper clipping from the early twenty-first century on a faculty bulletin board. The clipping depicted a young female runner, named “Sarah Porter” in the caption, lying exhausted on the ground after a marathon. One campus wit had added a handwritten Post-it note: “Finally! A photo of when she was younger!”

The Digital Collections

Four digital collections were created during the practicum: the Sarah Porter Collection, Rules and Daily School Life, Letters from Notable People, and Sarah Abroad: 1872 Letters from Europe.

The first two collections created were the Sarah Porter Collection and the Rules and Daily School Life collection. The Sarah Porter Collection documents the life of Porter and includes posed portrait photographs of her and other family members taken between the late 1850s and 1889 (figure 1). Many of the photographs were taken at studios in New York City, though there are also early photos taken in Farmington by Karl Klauser, whom Porter had recruited from Germany to teach music. Also included in the collection are Porter family genealogical notes.¹⁹



Figure 1: Wilson Bros., “Sarah Porter with chair 1866,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://sarahportermips.omeka.net/items/show/13>.

¹⁹ Items of genealogical interest include Sarah Porter Family, unknown, “Porter Family Record,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermips.omeka.net/items/show/148>; and Sarah Porter family, unknown, “Porter Family genealogy,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermips.omeka.net/items/show/146>.

The Rules and Daily School Life collection includes Porter's handwritten rule book (figure 2) dating to the 1850s, which outlines how she structured her school.²⁰ There are several printed notices from the 1860s and 1870s that list fees and school dates, and advise parents of expectations regarding student attire.²¹ Porter's death in 1900 led to a fundraising campaign by former students. This campaign funded the construction of Sarah Porter Memorial Hall, which in 1913 was dedicated and donated to the First Church of Christ across the street from the school (where Porter's father had been minister).²² Included in the collection are appeals, pamphlets, and photographs related to this female-led philanthropic campaign.

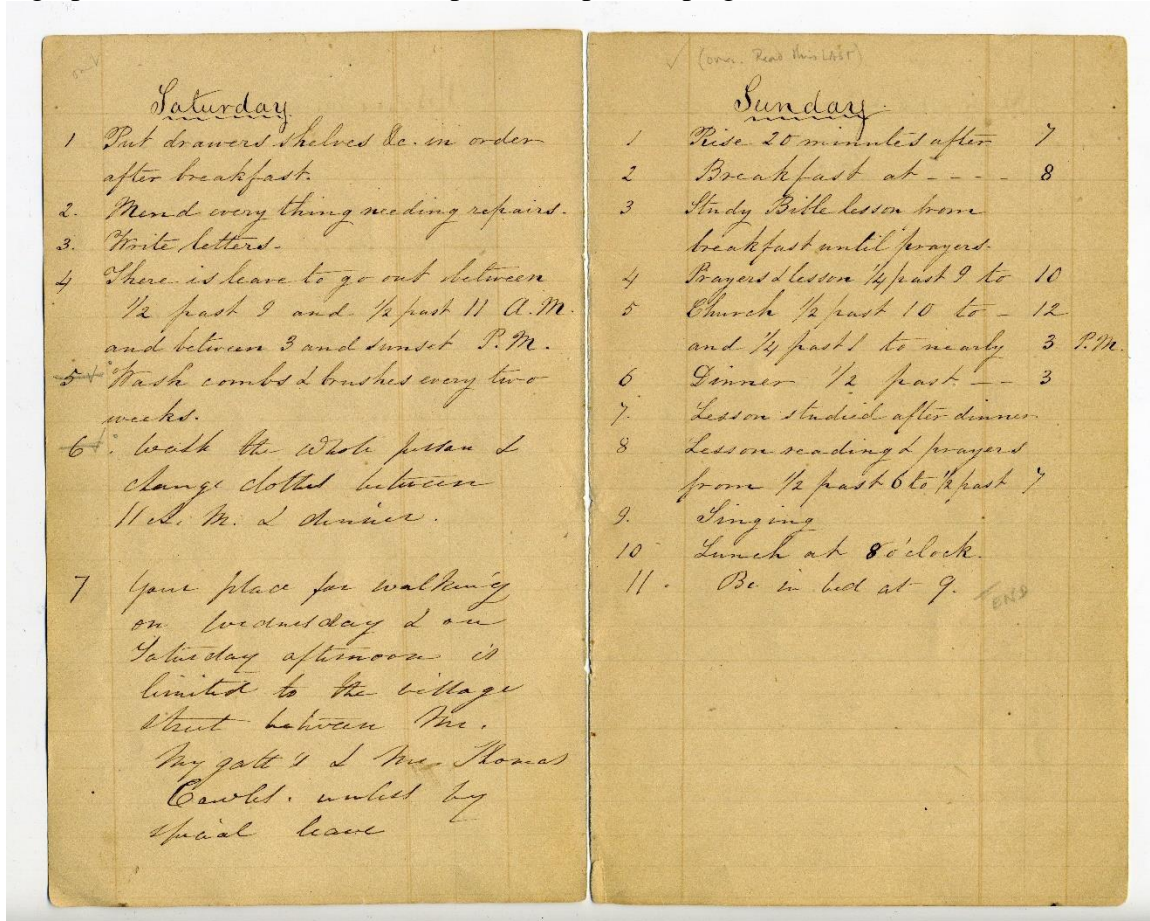


Figure 2: Sarah Porter, 1813–1900, “1850s: Sarah Porter’s Rule Book,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/93>.

The most intimate glimpses of Porter as an individual come from a collection of letters written to her mother and sisters (Sarah Abroad: 1872 Letters from Europe). At the age of fifty-nine, Porter traveled to Europe. The collection contains handwritten letters Porter wrote in England, Scotland, Belgium, and France; content suggests this was Porter’s first travel abroad. There is a typewritten

²⁰ Sarah Porter, 1813–1900, “1850s: Sarah Porter’s Rule Book,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/93>.

²¹ Sarah Porter, 1813–1900, “1862: ‘Not more costly than \$1.50 per yard,’” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/20>.

²² Unknown Artist, “Printed brochure, Sarah Porter Memorial Centenary Endowment Fund,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/199>.

itinerary and handwritten notes that briefly describe the contents of some letters. Most of the letters in the physical collection had not been transcribed and only the letters themselves are in the archives; there are no envelopes or stamps.

Porter's letters are an interesting account of her travels and a snapshot of world events at the time. In letters from Edinburgh, Porter writes of local preparations for Queen Victoria's travel to the area.²³ The letters highlight a convergence of two women in history as Porter (granddaughter of American revolutionaries and founder of one of America's earliest schools for girls) crosses paths with the most politically powerful woman in the world. Porter's letters written aboard the steamship *Algeria* are also of interest. Written in 1872 during the early boom in immigration to the United States, the letters portray an educated woman connecting with the old continent of Europe. The letters also illuminate Porter's advocacy of temperance (the start of the temperance movement officially dates to 1873, a year after these letters were written). In one missive (figure 3), Porter comments on the habitual drinking of fellow passengers like Richard Busteed, the US district judge from Alabama at the time.²⁴

Discovered in month three, during digitization of the letters from Europe, was an uncatalogued box in the physical collection. Marked in pencil on the exterior simply as "Letters from Notable People," the box contains correspondence dating to the 1800s and 1900s from more than eighty individuals important to American history. Many of the letters were written to Porter's older brother Noah (during his tenure as president of Yale College in New Haven) or to Porter's nephew's family (who ran the school after her death). The nature of correspondence in the Letters from Notable People collection suggests many items came into the school archive via a family collection following Noah Porter's death in the late 1800s. One item, Abraham Lincoln's autograph, pasted inside a bound black leather book with a simple note, appears to have definitively belonged to Porter herself. Featured items appearing at the front of the Notable Letters collection emphasize notable women in the late 1800s. Included are items from Julia Ward Howe, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Kate Tryon, Mary A. Ward, Kate Douglas Wiggin, and former first lady Lucretia Garfield.

Most items digitized for Notable Letters predate 1918. The items do not tell their own story so much as represent a body of correspondence from public figures. The presence of transcriptions for some letters, the separation of letters into folders labeled by individual, and preservation efforts (many items are encased in plastic sheeting) suggests these items may have been displayed. The collection is mostly a record of invitations declined or accepted to guest lecture. Correspondence includes several letters marked personal and written on executive mansion stationery by President Rutherford B. Hayes. There are also letters from presidents James Garfield and Herbert Hoover, and from Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. Included are several letters from English poet Matthew Arnold during his 1883 and 1884 tour of the United States. There are also multiple letters from congregationalist Lyman Abbott and secretary of the navy George Bancroft. In 1855 Harvard geologist Louis Agassiz issued a preprinted response to his invitation to lecture at the school, noting that his work precluded guest lecturing for "at least ten years." The letter was sent

²³ Sarah Porter, 1813–1900, "Letter from Royal Hotel Edinburgh, August 9, 1872," *Miss Porter's School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/127>.

²⁴ Sarah Porter, 1813–1900, "Letter on board Steam Ship *Algeria*, Irish Channel, July 30, 1872," *Miss Porter's School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/139>.

two years before the publication of the first of four volumes of his *Natural History of the United States*.

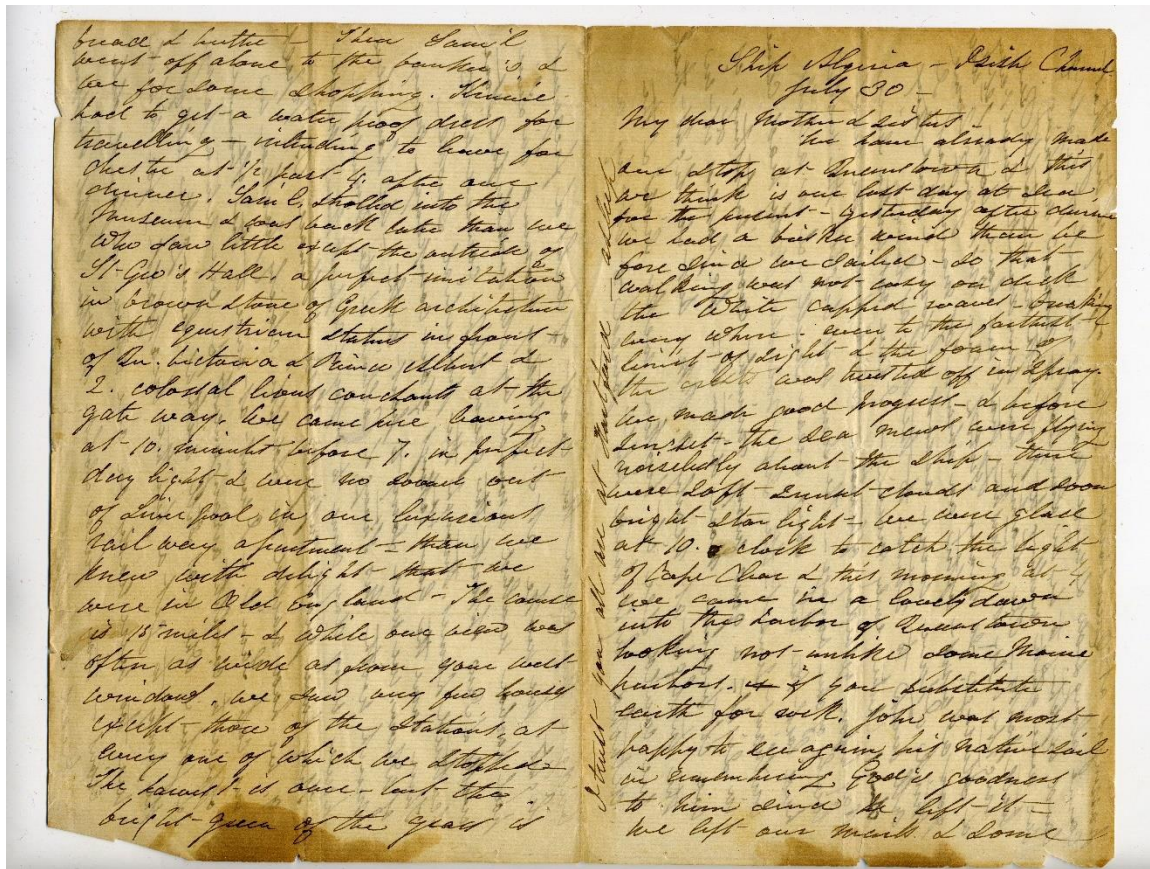


Figure 3: Sarah Porter, 1813–1900, “Letter on board Steam Ship Algeria, Irish Channel, July 30, 1872,” Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://sarahportermss.ms.omeka.net/items/show/139>.

Issues with Marginalization

In a 2002 article, Joan Schwartz and Terry Cooke examined the belief that archivists “have perceived themselves as neutral, objective, impartial.”²⁵ They argue that decisions about what to preserve are socially constructed, and that refusal to acknowledge power as it relates to archives is an abdication of professional responsibility. Schwartz and Cooke also note that archivists leave their own figurative and literal “footprints” on the archival record, and that archives throughout history have excluded records about women. They conclude that archivists should “search thoroughly for the missing voices” while noting critics may feel that pointing out any history of marginalization means only future marginalization.²⁶ In addition to the processing, curating, and descriptive skills that the practicum provided, the author gained valuable theoretical experience evaluating historical footprints within a collection. Many of these footprints illustrate issues related

²⁵ Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1–19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

to marginalization.

Porter's letters to her mother and sisters from Europe in 1872 make for interesting reading. Yet they also show that this accomplished unmarried woman in her late fifties was essentially chaperoned on the trip by a brother. Porter was not a feminist by modern standards; she opposed women's right to vote. Guest speakers at the school in the early 1900s after her death also included anti-suffragists. The one issue Porter was roused to fundraise for during her lifetime was a temperance initiative (to buy out a local tavern and protect students from corrupting moral influences). Although Porter hired female teachers, photographic representations of her in the digital collection, as well as the portraits of her that adorn school walls, were taken by men. These images tend to depict Porter as a solitary, bookish, older woman—isolated in a genteel quest to educate young women (figure 4).²⁷ While Porter made plans for a female successor, between 1917 and 1983 the school was run by a succession of men or married couples, with men in the role of primary decision maker. During periods of great significance to women's emancipation (the 1920s, 1960s, and 1970s), the school was led by men, not women.



Figure 4: Richard Storm DeLamater, 1833–1915, “Sarah Porter in her room by R. S. DeLamater, 1880s,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/1>.

The Porter’s digital archive project illustrates complex issues of women’s self-marginalization over time. The most obvious current issue relates to a lack of funding for an archivist, archival supplies, and the need for increased storage and working space for the physical collections. The archival footprint also suggested that archivists or others responsible for sharing institutional history may have engaged in self-editing. For example, the binding of Porter’s original handwritten rule book (featured in the Rules collection) is broken. Interior pages are kept loosely in order, without page numbers. The book has been preserved in the physical collection with a note to only

²⁷ R. S. DeLamater, “Sarah Porter in her room by R. S. De Lemater, 1880s,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/1>.

allow access to a photocopy and not to the original. But on the original, penciled instructions at the top of pages state whether to “omit” or include the page. Of nineteen pages of handwritten text, eight are marked for omission. It is not clear why these pages were so marked. Omitted pages cover rules related to study hours, walking between classes, musical practice, drawing class, borrowing books, writing letters home, personal neatness, and how to best spend one’s time on Saturday. One possibility is that these omitted pages were not included in the photocopy available to archival visitors. Another possibility is that at some point the rules were reproduced, and the pages marked for omission were deemed no longer relevant.

Examples of self-marginalization also occur within the Notable Letters collection. This collection is composed mainly of letters from well-known men. There are a few items from well-known women, including a photo from Harriet Beecher Stowe and letters from author Julia Ward Howe, journalist Kate Tryon, and anti-suffragist Mary Augusta Ward. What is apparent in the physical collection is the difference with how items written by women were processed over time compared with items written by many of the men. Clear attempts at preservation were made for letters from individuals like Matthew Arnold and George Bancroft, where letters were encased in plastic sheeting and almost universally included typed transcriptions. Folder contents for these items were also in date order, with envelopes, transcriptions, and letters clipped together to show association. By comparison, two letters dating to 1900 are from Julia Ward Howe. These letters were not encased in plastic, had no transcriptions, and were not clipped together with envelopes. In this case, the neglect was confusing because the letters both had the same date, while the envelopes were postmarked days apart (Howe had originally mailed a letter and then, thinking she had failed to mail the first, sent a duplicate). Similarly, items from Agnes Irwin and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps were neither transcribed nor encased.

Historical bias may also be found in a typed content list for the physical collection of Notable Letters, presumably produced at the school in the 1900s.²⁸ The content list is incomplete, describing only items from authors with surnames beginning with the letters A to E. Therefore, it is hard to state with certainty that the typed content list included no female names (figure 5). What is known is that the content list does not appear to have been added to or updated apart from one handwritten amendment. This means that there are curious omissions, such as Agnes Irwin (whose surname admittedly begins with an “I”). Irwin was the first dean of Radcliffe College and coeditor of *Worthy Women of Our First Century*. Her 1896 letter to Robert Porter Keep Jr. offered advice on how to compensate female employees fairly based on their professional experience (figure 6). Also not on the list is Kate Douglas Wiggin, author of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, who declined an invitation to lecture at the school, in part because she had “married me a husband” (figure 7).²⁹ While it is possible that these and other letters from notable women were received at the archive after the content list was created, it is curious that they do not seem to have been indexed or preserved even during the decades since the 1970s women’s rights movement.

²⁸ Miss Porter’s School, “Catalog list of Letters from Notable People,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/150>.

²⁹ Kate Douglas Smith Wiggin, 1856–1923, “Letter from Kate Douglas Wiggin, no date,” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/175>.

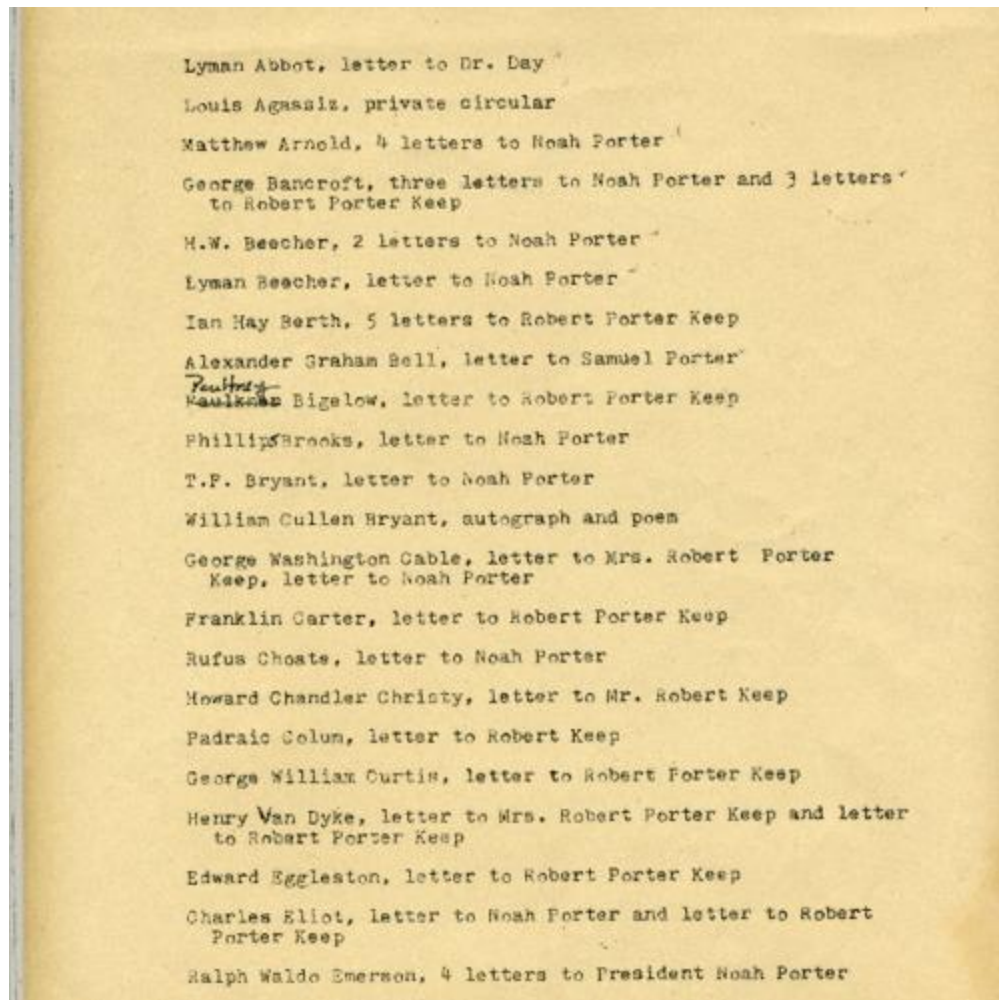


Figure 5: Miss Porter's School, "Catalog list of Letters from Notable People," *Miss Porter's School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://sarahportermpls.omeka.net/items/show/150>.

These issues might not be surprising in the larger context of women's struggle for fair representation, except the school was founded by a woman and, despite being led by married couples or men for many decades, it has a strong tradition of solo female leadership.³⁰ The archival treatment of the Notable Letters collection demonstrates a footprint of preference given to preservation efforts for items related to male historical figures even at an elite institution that was among the first to provide equal educational access to American women. While it is possible items were originally processed and preserved at another institution and then transferred to the school's archive (i.e., Yale University in the case of Noah Porter's letters), equity in preservation status did not appear to have subsequently been undertaken at the school. It may also simply be that this was not considered a priority; after all the school has been a leader in educating women who have made great and lasting contributions to global society across numerous fields, a different kind of "footprint" in itself. Still, there is an opportunity for the school's archive to better reflect this

³⁰ The school has been led by women for more than ninety of its one hundred and seventy-six years. The school was founded in 1843 and overseen by Sarah Porter for fifty-seven years until her death in 1900; for the past thirty-five years, since 1984, it has been led only by women. For additional context, see Mosely, "Women in Archives," 215, 221.

history. With the revival of a student archives club, led by the school's librarian, disparities in archival treatment can start to be addressed going forward. Doing so might also provide a practical and powerful instructional moment for students within the institution relating to issues of self-marginalization, preservation, representation, and the evolution of women's empowerment.

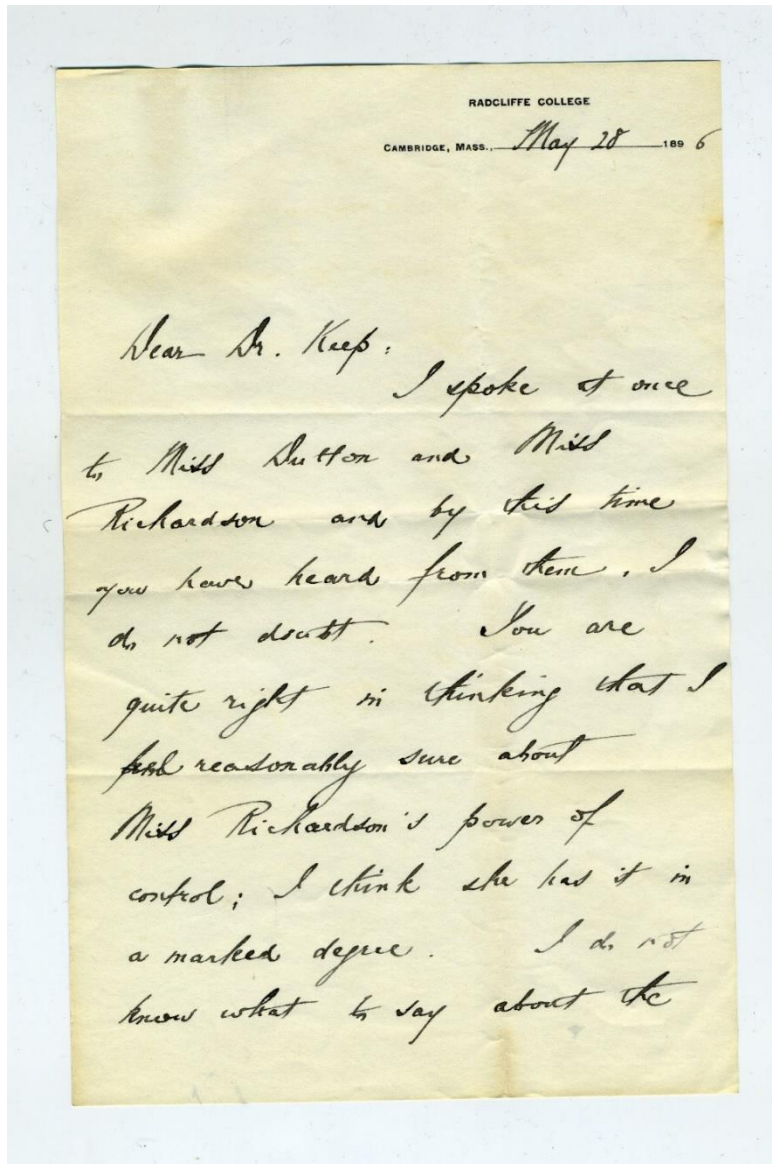


Figure 6: Agnes Irwin, 1841–1914, "Letter from Agnes Irwin, 28 May 1896," Miss Porter's School Ford Library Digital Archives, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://sarahportermpps.omeka.net/items/show/205>.

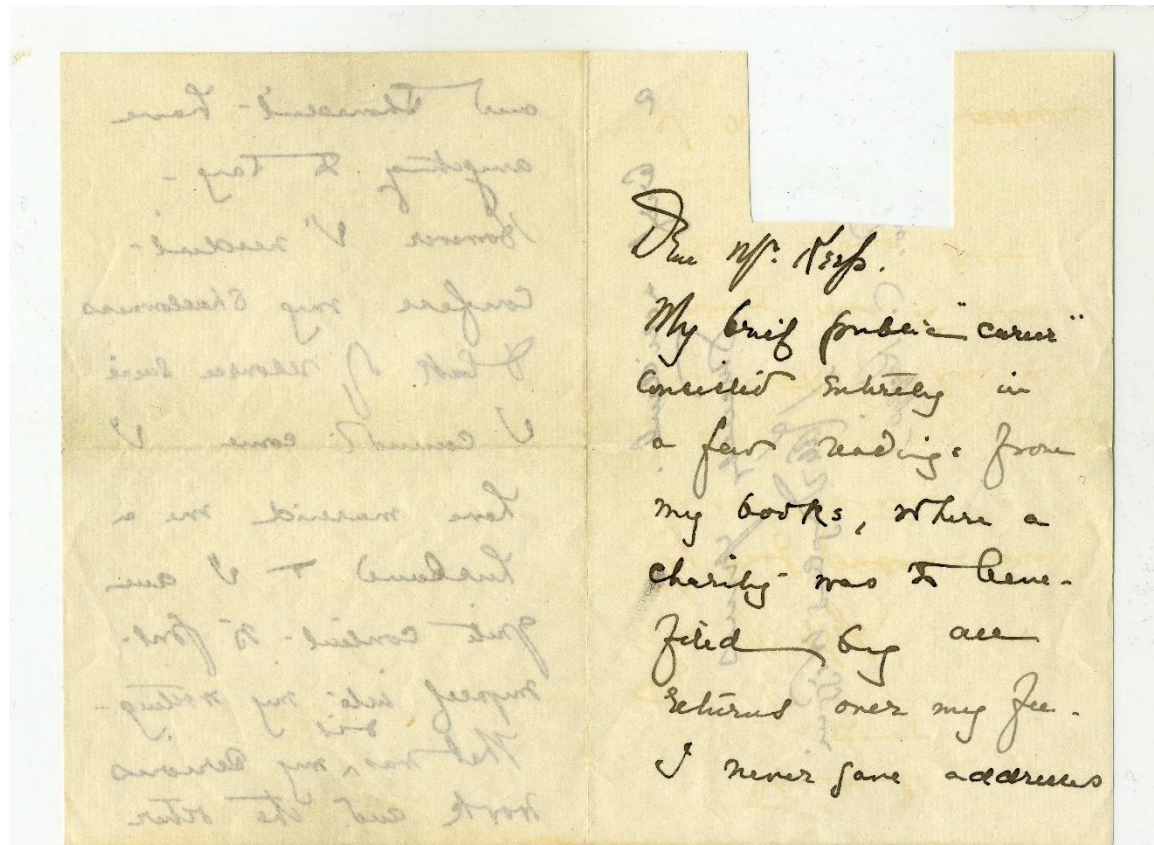


Figure 7: Kate Douglas Smith Wiggin, 1856–1923, “Letter from Kate Douglas Wiggin, no date: ‘I have married me a husband,’” *Miss Porter’s School Ford Library Digital Archives*, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://sarahportermss.omeka.net/items/show/175>.

Recommendations

There is great potential for independent girls’ schools to add to the archival record in women’s education. As the list of forty independent schools in table 1 showed, there are sixteen single-sex female schools established more than a century ago that are still operating. Of these, only three currently have digitized collections, meaning that we may look forward to discovering more about these institutions, their contributions in paving the way to equal educational access, and how they have handled issues of representation over time.

Schools should not avoid digitizing their collections because doing so might reveal a less than exemplary archival footprint by today’s standard. As collections are digitized, archivists should use a variety of means to help scholars in women’s studies discover them. Independent school principals and librarians seeking guidance on how to manage archives may want to consult the established practices for college and university archives.³¹

³¹ In particular, see page 346 of Dwight H. Wilson, “Archives in Colleges and Universities: Some Comments on Data Collected by the Society’s Committee on College and University Archives,” *The American Archivist* 13, no. 4 (October 1950): 343–50. Also, Nicholas C. Burckel, “Establishing a College Archives: Possibilities and Priorities,” *College and Research Libraries* 36, no. 5 (September 1975): 384–92; and Ken Osborne, “Archives in the Classroom,” *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986–87): 16–23.

In order to address the problem of the marginalization of women's history, a recent initiative in the United Kingdom is encouraging teachers at British girls' schools to search their school archives and capture the story of female education.³² For private schools, these types of initiatives have a growing importance. Declining enrollment and revenue pressure mean that independent schools with archival holdings may find it tempting to raise funds through the sale of unique items.³³ Girls' schools, which face the threat of both declining independent school enrollment and a rise in coeducational options, occupy a particularly perilous position in this landscape, making digitization a more pressing need.

Archivists can also add to the historical record as far as information about individual women is concerned. The Porter's archive has only selected letters from notable women who worked in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet a number of these women made major contributions to American and world history. By digitizing and coding their correspondence, an institution can retain physical control but enable scholars to discover and use items, adding to the body of research on specific individuals. Archives that have more extensive collections can likewise discover the single items being held elsewhere to assist researchers in filling in gaps in the record.

While Sarah Porter held conservative political beliefs, her work to expand educational access to female students made her somewhat revolutionary for her time. Her school's archive includes not only rich information about her own career but, as items in the Notable Letters collection attest, adds to the historical record for other professional women of the era. Digitizing material from girls' schools that were operating in the 1800s will only enhance and expand the permanent historical record and educate a wider audience in the area of women's history. During digitization, archivists should be prepared to address the effects of historical bias by applying basic preservation techniques, updating content lists, and using the inevitable discoveries of disparate and unequal treatment as a teachable moment.

In addition to digitization, archivists and librarians can incorporate physical collections into the fabric of current institutional life. While Miss Porter's School already does this with archival displays at annual alumnae reunions, the school could also create physical exhibits on campus. After identifying gaps in the collection and areas of niche expertise, the school could also implement a targeted collection policy with outreach to its alumnae and students.

A few months after this practicum, the author was invited to illustrate how to navigate the digital archive during an orientation session for new faculty at the school. The goal was to spur teachers to identify ways in which they could incorporate the school's own history in their course content across all subject areas. Future digital collections, as well as existing digital and physical collections, should be highlighted for teaching faculty on an annual basis.

³² Becky Sheaves, "A Revealing Girls' School Archive Recalls a More Innocent Age of Gymslips and Hockey Sticks," *Daily Mail*, 30 August 2007, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-478654/A-revealing-girls-school-archive-recalls-innocent-age-gymslips-hockey-sticks.html>.

³³ Recent articles have highlighted unique and marketable works in independent school archives. See Diane Orson, "Long-Lost Babe Ruth Interview Discovered in Prep School Archives," National Public Radio, February 22, 2018, and Alan Gibbs, "New Light on Holst and Friends: Manuscript Discoveries at St Paul's Girls' School," *Tempo* 60, no. 237 (2006), 44–58, doi:10.1017/S0040298206000210.

On a broader scale, graduate students in library and archival fields should be encouraged to consider practicums at female single-sex secondary schools, with the goal of increasing the number of institutions that have digital content available for wider scholarly use. Librarians at schools can partner with area graduate programs to offer ongoing practicum opportunities as a cost-effective way to preserve their collections and increase access. Host institutions as well as faculty in library science and archival departments should encourage these practicum students to publish their experiences and findings, perhaps including such work as a formal practicum goal.

Finally, administrators, librarians, and archivists at single-sex female independent schools should consider collaboration on the scale of the Seven Sisters' College Women project (<https://www.collegewomen.org/>). This project enables users to search the digital archives of all seven historic women's colleges in one spot. Individual items are searchable across all institutional repositories through the addition of thematic coding, which precludes the necessity of using just one metadata schema. This type of centralized collaborative platform would be of great benefit to students, faculty, and scholars in sharing the larger story of women's secondary school education and would further illustrate the extensive impact that graduates of these schools have had on women's political and social emancipation in America and around the globe.

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